

May 11, 2004

PAGE ONE


At the Pentagon, Quirky PowerPoint Carries Big Punch

**In a World of 'Gap' States,
Mr. Barnett Urges Generals
To Split Forces in Two**

Austin Powers on Soundtrack

By GREG JAFFE
 Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
 May 11, 2004; Page A1

DOW JONES REPRINTS

 This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit:
www.djreprints.com.

- See a sample reprint in PDF format.
- Order a reprint of this article now.

In 1998, Thomas Barnett, an obscure Defense Department analyst, teamed up with senior executives at the Wall Street firm Cantor Fitzgerald LP to study how globalization was changing national security.

One scenario they studied was a meltdown caused by the Y2K computer bug followed by terrorist attacks designed to exploit the chaos. Mr. Barnett posited that Wall Street would shut down for a week. Gun violence, racially motivated attacks and sales of antidepressants would surge. The U.S. military would find itself embroiled in brushfire conflicts across the developing world.



Thomas Barnett

His theories were met with skepticism. "People began referring to me as the Nostradamus of Y2K," Mr. Barnett says.

Then came the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Suddenly Mr. Barnett didn't look so crazy.

At the urging of his Pentagon bosses, Mr. Barnett overhauled the concept to address more directly the post-9/11 world. The result is a three-hour PowerPoint presentation that more resembles performance art than a Pentagon briefing. It's making Mr. Barnett, 41 years old, a key figure in the debate currently raging about what the modern military should look like. Senior military officials say his decidedly controversial ideas are influencing the way the Pentagon views its enemies, vulnerabilities and future structure.

Mr. Barnett's military is a far cry from the shape of today's armed forces. Instead of a single force to wage wars and rebuild nations, Mr. Barnett envisions two. The first, which he dubs "Leviathan," would be hard-hitting, ready to take on conventional foes such as Saddam Hussein on a moment's notice. The second, more unconventional force of "System Administrators" would focus on bringing dysfunctional states into the mainstream through the type of nation-building operations seen in Iraq, the Balkans and Eastern Africa. It wouldn't only mop up after wars but would travel the world during peacetime building local security forces and infrastructure.

This blueprint for America's defense force comes wrapped in a presentation devised by Mr. Barnett that samples the "ching ching" sound effect from the television series "Law & Order," borrows lines from the Sopranos and features the voice of movie character Austin Powers calling out "Oh yeah, baby!" to punctuate a key idea. At one point, upsetting some, Mr. Barnett refers to 9/11 as the "first live-broadcast, mass snuff film in human history."

"Tom polarizes people with his brief. They either love it or they hate it," says retired Navy Capt. Bradd Hayes, a professor at the Naval War College, where Mr. Barnett also teaches.

With the military struggling in Iraq and Afghanistan, it's possible the American public could lose its appetite for anything that smacks of intervening in troubled states. But it's precisely these problems that are prompting senior officials to listen more closely to the pitch. A group of strategic planners from the Pentagon's Joint Staff invited him to kick off a two-day retreat in April for senior officers. Afterward they told Mr. Barnett they wanted him to brief a more senior group. The Navy's top admiral recently e-mailed an essay written by Mr. Barnett to the service's top brass.

Rep. Mac Thornberry, a Republican and a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, says Mr. Barnett has shaped his views on China, global trade, foreign aid and national defense. "Since the fall of the Soviet Union we haven't had a global strategy with bipartisan appeal that can survive changes in administration and in Congress," the lawmaker says. He thinks this could fit the bill.

Mr. Barnett conjured up his vision at the urging of Retired Vice Adm. Arthur Cebrowski. After 9/11, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld tapped the admiral to run a new office in the Pentagon, dubbed the Office of Force Transformation, focusing on changing the military, one of Mr. Rumsfeld's pet projects. Adm. Cebrowski turned to Mr. Barnett because he first wanted a better idea of what a post-9/11 military was supposed to do. During the Cold War it was designed primarily to contain Communism. "The Soviet Union was the principal designer of our force," the admiral says.

Adm. Cebrowski, a 61-year-old former naval aviator, flew 158 combat missions in Vietnam and commanded an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf War. He's a devout Catholic who attends Mass every day and raves about Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ."

Mr. Barnett, by contrast, studied at Leningrad State University in the mid-1980s, taught Marxism among other subjects at Harvard, and voted for Al Gore for president. He maintains his own Web page (thomaspmbarnett.com¹) that features his wife's poetry, a eulogy he wrote on his father's death and a book-length chronicle of his eldest daughter's successful battle with cancer.

For much of the 1990s, Mr. Barnett worked for the Center for Naval Analyses, a federally funded research center. He is currently a senior professor in the Warfare Analysis department of the Naval War College in Rhode Island, where Adm. Cebrowski served as president until 2001.

In Mr. Barnett's world, countries are divided into two categories. His "core" countries are part of a global community linked by trade, migration and capital flows. Europe, the U.S., India and China fall into this group. Then there are "gap" countries that either refuse to join the global mainstream (such as Saudi Arabia and Iran), or are unable to because they have no central government or are struggling with debilitating crises (such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and much of sub-Saharan Africa).

"The 'gap' is a petri dish of grief, repression, terrorism and disease," says Adm. Cebrowski. "And 9/11 shows we can't wall ourselves off from it."

To join those worlds together, Mr. Barnett envisions two different military forces. The Leviathan force consists of stealthy submarines, long-range bombers and highly trained soldiers who are "young, unmarried and slightly p- off," Mr. Barnett says.

The System Administrator force is named for the technology wonks who run corporate computer networks. This force is focused on training "gap state" security forces, stamping out insurgencies and rebuilding basic infrastructure such as legal systems and power grids.

That force would include lightly armored soldiers, the Marine Corps and officials from the State, Justice and



Arthur Cebrowski

Commerce departments along with the U.S. Agency for International Development. Its troops would be older and more specialized than the Leviathans. The purpose of the System Administrators would be to bring order to a country, but the force would also be strong enough to defend itself.

This concept relies on a key assumption: The power of the U.S.'s nuclear and conventional arms, plus increasing global economic interdependence, has made war between superpowers a thing of the past. It also assumes that wars with less-powerful states are less likely to occur.

Instead, the U.S. is more likely to find itself embroiled in dysfunctional parts of the world battling terrorists and rebuilding failed states, something it doesn't do very well. "You guys can do two or three Iraq wars a year, no problem," Mr. Barnett recently told a group of senior officers from the Joint Staff. "But you can't do one occupation."

It's not clear what Mr. Rumsfeld thinks of Mr. Barnett's vision. Adm. Cebrowski has briefed the Pentagon chief on key aspects as recently as last month and says he got a warm reception. A Pentagon spokesman says the press office wasn't able to determine Mr. Rumsfeld's reaction to the briefing.

Many worry Mr. Barnett's concept leaves the U.S. unprepared to fight a big war with countries such as China and North Korea. "What if we are misreading China's intentions the way we misread radical Islam?" asks Michael Vickers, a national-security analyst and former CIA officer who does consulting work for the Pentagon.

Mr. Barnett bets that advanced technologies will allow the U.S. to fight wars with smaller, high-tech formations. Some military analysts, such as retired Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Paul Van Riper, think that's naive. Gen. Van Riper, who plays the enemy in Pentagon war games, says enemies could too easily hide from the Leviathan force's sophisticated surveillance. He also thinks the System Administrator force wouldn't be strong enough to defend itself in places such as Fallujah.

"I admire Adm. Cebrowski," he says. "But this is absolute nonsense from folks who are thinking about war as they want it to be, not as it actually is. War is a terribly nasty, brutish business."

The Pentagon has a history of taking intellectual cues from unexpected sources. In the 1970s and 1980s Andrew Marshall, a low-profile Pentagon analyst who runs an office similar to that of Adm. Cebrowski, argued that wars could be revolutionized by precision bombs, unmanned planes and wireless communications that would allow the U.S. to destroy enemies from a distance.

Mr. Marshall, who cultivated a network of prominent military officers and civilians, rarely spoke in public and almost all his papers are classified. But his ideas have informed the way the U.S. military fought high-intensity wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "Andy Marshall's kind of like a rabbi," says Mr. Barnett.

Mr. Barnett has delivered his brief some 150 times since 9/11. Pearson PLC's Penguin Group published it earlier this year as a book, "The Pentagon's New Map," and Mr. Barnett penned a shortened version for Esquire magazine.

On a spring day in Washington, Mr. Barnett stepped into a room full of generals, admirals and colonels from the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs of Staff. His job was to kick off a two-day retreat where the military would debate his ideas.

In the room was the deputy director of operations for the U.S. Central Command. A few seats away sat the Army colonel whose battalion led the famous "Thunder Run" into Baghdad that toppled Saddam Hussein. Seated across the room was an Air Force brigadier general -- one of only a handful of U.S. fighter pilots to have shot down an enemy plane in combat over the past two decades. Mr. Barnett recognized none of them.

The lights dimmed and Mr. Barnett, clad in a dark turtleneck and khakis, launched into his brief. He soon flashed up on a screen a picture of a mock personal ad that he found taped to a Pentagon wall in the late 1990s.

"ENEMY WANTED: Mature North American Superpower seeks hostile partner for arms racing, Third World conflicts and general antagonism. Must be sufficiently menacing to convince Congress of military financial requirements...Send note with pictures of fleet and air squadrons to CHAIRMAN JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF/PENTAGON."

In the early days of the current Bush administration, senior Pentagon officials thought China, with its growing arsenal of ballistic missiles and increasingly sophisticated submarine fleet, might fill this role.

Mr. Barnett's work with Cantor Fitzgerald, which stemmed from a long-standing relationship between the firm and the Naval War College, convinced him otherwise. China was buying U.S. debt, angling to join the World Trade Organization and growing increasingly dependent on foreign direct investment. "China isn't the problem, it's the prize," he told the officers.

He displayed a map of the sprawling "gap," which includes most of Africa, Central Asia, the Middle East and a big chunk of Central and South America. "This is globalization's ozone hole," he said.

In the past, Mr. Barnett's pitch for a System Administrator, or nation-building force, was often greeted with howls of disapproval from military crowds. A year of faltering progress in Iraq has made his ideas more palatable. One Army colonel in the audience compared the Iraq nation-building mission to a screw that needs to be driven into a wall. "Right now all we've got is a hammer and we are driving that screw into the wall with our hammer as best we can. But it won't set right. What we really need is a screwdriver," he said.

An Air Force general suggested the bifurcation of the force recommended by Mr. Barnett was already quietly happening. The Army National Guard, a force comprising part-time soldiers, used to be indistinguishable from the regular Army. Today, it's trading weaponry used in high-intensity conflicts for military-police units to restore law and order.

One Army colonel balked at the presentation, suggesting it might not be possible to save some societies, such as Saudi Arabia, or even Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Aren't you assuming the people in the 'gap' think like you and want the same things as you?" he asked.

"Everyone wants a better future for their kids," said Mr. Barnett.

"I've been around a lot of people who don't think like us," the officer replied.

After the meeting, the group -- led by a team of one- and two-star admirals and generals -- decided to recommend that Mr. Barnett brief the military's most senior four-star generals at a retreat later this year.

It's not likely that the Pentagon will officially split the military into a Leviathan force and a System Administrator force. But acceptance for the general concept is growing. "I used to be afraid to pitch the Sys Admin force," Mr. Barnett said after his speech to the Joint Staff officers. "I literally would worry that I'd get laughed off the stage."

Write to Greg Jaffe at greg.jaffe@wsj.com²

URL for this article:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB108422659793107325,00.html>

Hyperlinks in this Article:

(1) <http://thomaspmbarnett.com>

(2) <mailto:greg.jaffe@wsj.com>

Copyright 2004 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our **Subscriber Agreement** and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.

